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SUBJECT: Media Reaction - Mideast - Gaza, Arab-Israeli engagement;  
Sao Paulo

A new year with the old conflicts in the Mideast

Editorial in business-oriented Valor Econômico (12/30) says: "The disproportionate response to the attacks [by Hamas]...should be cause for great discomfort in the international community.... All signs point to the fact that Israel is trying to take advantage of the internal Palestinian divisions...and counts on the discontent of the population, which has been suffocated by the embargo imposed by Tel Aviv. More than that, [Israel] is keeping an eye on the February 10th elections and on the polls that show former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, from the right-wing Likud Party, in clearly ascending. So far, the isolation imposed by Israel, the U.S. and the European Union on Hamas has, indeed, strengthened those nations' preferred partner in Palestine, the Fatah.... The disproportionate military reaction and the ever more precarious living conditions...have a great chance of causing among the Palestinians something they themselves have not been able to achieve: uniting internal adversaries.... The trend, by the way, is that not only that the Palestinians unite, but that Arab countries work together to deter the escalation of violence in the region."

Immediate cease-fire

Lead editorial in liberal Folha de S.Paulo (12/30) states: "The attacks perpetrated by the Palestinian extremist group Hamas against Israel merit repudiation. But the brutal reaction by Israel...has to be condemned, as well.... The offensive against Hamas, in Gaza, looks like an attempt by the ruling coalition to avoid the victory of Benjamin Netanyahu in the February elections.... The rightward leaning tendency on the part of Israeli voters also seems to be a reaction to the Mideast policy announced by Barack Obama. The U.S. President-elect has promised a broad diplomacy and does not rule out negotiating with Iran, which Israel regards as the major strategic threat to the Jewish State.... The hard-line platform that emerges from the confluence of these factors brings well-known traps...[But] Without a political solution that really grants autonomy and economic feasibility to a Palestinian State in the Mideast, the substratum that favors the spiral of hostilities will remain intact. The most important issue right now, however, is to secure an immediate cease-fire between Hamas and Israel."

Massacre in the Gaza Ghetto

Column by Clovis Rossi in Folha de S.Paulo (12/30) says: "The West finds it enormously difficult to condemn Israel, even when it deserves it. This can only be explained by a guilty conscience. After all, the Holocaust, one of the most nefarious crimes in History, was not the act of Arabs or religious fundamentalists, but that of Aryan Europeans.... In truth, Israel has been committing crimes against Palestinians for many, many years.... But it is in the Gaza Strip that the violence reaches the peak. This year Israel blocked access to Gaza, turning the area into a 362-square-kilometer ghetto where 1.5 million people are piled up one on top of another.... The risks Israel is subject to are not to be minimized.... But adopting a collective form of punishment is

intolerable and ineffective.... There is no point in trying to asfixiate Hamas..... Unless one believes that Hamas won [the elections] because all the Palestinians from Gaza are terrorists. Those who believe in this hypothesis will end up proposing a 'final solution' to the Gaza ghetto."

Fire over Gaza

Main editorial in center-right O Estado de S.Paulo (12/30) states:

"Former Prime-Minister

Benjamin Netanyahu, the main opponent of [current Israeli Prime-Minister] Ehud Barak... in the February elections, has been demanding a decisive military action from the government against Hamas. So, the shower of Hamas rockets targeting Israel provided the excuse.... For at least a week, Israeli diplomacy sought the support of major powers and its main allies for the upcoming offensive. The goal...was to create "an international umbrella...." The umbrella of support for Israel did not open. From all sides, except from the Bush administration, the offensive was harshly criticized, not because Israel should be denied the right to defend itself, but because its reaction was brutal and indiscriminate."

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